Out Front With the Divisional Cavalry

By Captain Elliott J. Bird

Alpha Company, 44th Engineer Battalion, Camp Howze, Korea, habitually supports 4th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment (4-7 Cavalry), in Korea. The opportunity is rare in the Engineer Corps, because divisional cavalry units do not usually have habitual engineer support. As a consequence, their offensive and defensive doctrine are not well integrated. The support that engineers provide on a consistent basis offers great combined-arms training. In providing support to 4-7 Cavalry, Alpha Company works outside of the rest of the 44th for all its combat operations. This article addresses many of the keys of the trade that can help in understanding the cavalry's mission and mindset and how task force engineers can best support it.

Cavalry Operations

The divisional cavalry squadron is usually out in front of the division providing security and/or reconnaissance. In essence, the squadron is the eyes and ears of the division and provides vital information that allows the division commander to make critical decisions on the battlefield. Cavalry operations can be broken into four subcategories as listed in FM 17-95, *Cavalry Operations*. They are reconnaissance, security, offense, and defense. As an engineer supporting these operations, it is essential to understand what they mean and the fundamentals involved. Of these operations, reconnaissance and security will be discussed.

The combined-arms team battle-tracks situation reports from the troops.

Reconnaissance Operations

Divisional cavalry squadrons perform area, route, and zone reconnaissance. The squadron or troop especially needs to use engineers on route reconnaissance operations. Cavalry squadrons and troops are trained on this task, but not to the level of expertise of the engineer platoon leader or company commander. Coordinating efforts and fully understanding the roles that the engineers and the squadron play on this mission help give better reconnaissance results. The squadron's mission for reconnaissance, in relation to the fundamentals of reconnaissance as stated in FM 17-95, is as follows:

- Maintain tempo and focus.
- Orient on the reconnaissance objective.
- Report all information rapidly and accurately.
- Retain freedom of maneuver.
- Gain and maintain enemy contact.
- Develop the situation rapidly.

The squadron is tasked to clear routes for follow-on forces from the division. It must maintain a fast tempo to allow the rest of the division with more firepower to move up the designated routes or recommend different routes. The engineer leader in this situation must understand the objective and ensure that the squadron does not get slowed down by obstacles. Ensuring that each troop has the capability to breach obstacles allows the squadron or troop to maintain the proper tempo and focus.

The squadron and engineer support must also remember to orient on the reconnaissance objective—usually form-fixed points on the battlefield. The temptation is to lose sight of the objective of clearing routes and to focus on the enemy. Engineers must not let the squadron become bogged down in heavy enemy contact, which is not the purpose of the recon. They must ensure that mobility corridors are open to the squadron.

In reporting information rapidly and accurately, engineers become key personnel. If a route is not passable by heavy vehicles or tanks, engineers must ensure that the situation is properly reported. All too often, a troop or squadron commander will decide if a route is passable to follow-on forces without engineer input. An incorrect assumption can impede an entire operation. The engineer leaders must readily determine the trafficability of routes.

The troop and squadron need engineers to give them freedom to maneuver. The squadron, which is usually up front, may be the first to come in contact with the enemy, and it maintains contact and develops the situation. All of these elements are necessary for engineers to understand. The squadron engineer in the tactical operations center (TOC) must plan alternate routes for the squadron to allow the troop commander the maneuver freedom he needs to accomplish the mission. The terrain analysis that engineers bring to bear on the situation is unparalleled. As they plan the routes, they ensure that troop commanders and engineer attachments understand the routes and purposes for them.

Once the squadron gains enemy contact, the focus of the engineer effort shifts to route accessibility and possible mobility problems. The squadron will continually maintain contact through air troops, but ground troops will rely on engineer planning to find the most accessible route that allows them to maintain contact.

As the squadron gains contact, it develops the situation, and the engineer effort becomes secondary. Depending on the situation, the engineers may plan for the squadron to continue to push forward offensively or to hand off the battle to follow-on units.

When engineers and the cavalry squadron use all of these fundamentals, they become a greater fighting team, accomplishing the necessary missions together.

Security Operations

Security operations for a cavalry squadron are usually based on executing a screening mission, which it frequently performs out in front of a brigade or division front. A screen line is nothing more than a defense in-depth that allows the squadron to trade ground for time and allows the division to properly prepare its defenses or reconsolidate its forces for future operations. To have an effective screen line, the squadron needs a good engineer plan that includes situational obstacles. Screening operations also use some basic security fundamentals:

- Orient on the main body.
- Perform continuous reconnaissance.
- Provide early and accurate warning.
- Provide reaction time and maneuver space.
- Maintain enemy contact.

When a cavalry squadron prepares a screen line, the squadron engineer must be directly linked into the planning process. To orient itself on the main body, it often calls on the engineer to coordinate with engineer units behind the screen line to find the emplaced obstacles and ensure that lanes are available for passage of lines. This allows the squadron commander accurate information on what the defense behind him looks like and how to establish his forces.

Soldiers from Alpha Company, 44th Engineer Battalion, work in the TOC, updating reports and tracking engineer effort on the battlefield.

Out in front, the squadron becomes the eyes and ears of the division, and the air troops continue to send in reports of enemy movement, which helps the division commander make decisions on the course of the battle. This continuous reconnaissance provides the early and accurate warning needed. The squadron engineer must have knowledge of all such spot reports so he can plan for situational obstacles.

The obstacles that are planned and put in are usually scatterable mines or quick obstacles to slow an enemy and provide the necessary reaction time and maneuver space. By slowing the enemy and integrating an effective obstacle plan to support the squadron's screen line, engineers help the squadron maintain combat power and fulfill its overriding mission as the eyes and ears of the division commander.

As discussed previously, once enemy contact is made, the squadron will strive to maintain contact. At this time, engineer effort becomes secondary to the squadron's battle. The engineer in the TOC must look ahead to the next course of action and provide necessary mobility planning for the squadron to accomplish.

Conclusion

It is important to remember the history of the cavalry, its great lineage, and its current mission. The division cavalry squadron moves fast and furiously on the modern battlefield. Its missions are different than any other unit, because it is not a normal maneuver battalion. Although its capabilities and diversity make it successful, with proper coordination and planning, engineers can facilitate the squadron's overall success.

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